DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 864 CS 212 633

AUTHOR Cianciolo, Patricia J.; Prawat, Richard S.
TITLE Experts Define the Ideal Elementary Literature Program. Elementary Subjects Center Series No. 29.
INSTITUTION Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, East Lansing, MI.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Dec 90
CONTRACT G0098C0226
NOTE 43p.
AVAILABLE FROM Institute for Research in Teaching, College of Education, Michigan State University, 252 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 ($4.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; Content Area Reading; Curriculum Design; *Curriculum Development; Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; English Curriculum; Higher Education; Literature Appreciation; Reading Programs; Reading Writing Relationship; Teacher Response
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study examined the views of six experts in the teaching of literature concerning ideal curricula in literature at the elementary school level. Data were developed from a detailed, written document in which the experts (three university professors who had made significant scholarly contributions in children's literature and three elementary school teachers with glowing reputations in the pedagogical area) provided feedback about ideal curricula in general and the literature curriculum in the elementary grades in particular. In terms of commonalities and differences, results revealed that all the experts agreed with the features of ideal curriculum described in the set of framing questions sent to each respondent. They favored a curriculum in literature that is much more focused and coherent than currently is the norm. Most respondents also viewed literature as an opportunity for fostering important goals--both within language arts and across other subject matter areas. Literature was considered a good tool for teaching writing, for example, or as a vehicle for teaching content in social studies. One respondent thought that good literature led to greater self-understanding. Results also revealed that the concept of literature as an aesthetic object worthy of study in its own right was notably absent in the perspectives represented. (An appendix contains the mission statements and objectives of this curriculum improvement study.) (Author/KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

4.0
CS

ED327864

Elementary Subjects Center
Series No. 29

EXPERTS DEFINE THE IDEAL ELEMENTARY LITERATURE PROGRAM

Patricia J. Cianciolo and
Richard S. Prawat

Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

Institute for Research on Teaching

College of Education

Michigan State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patricia J. Cianciola
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS212633

MSU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution

Elementary Subjects Center
Series No. 29

EXPERTS DEFINE THE IDEAL ELEMENTARY LITERATURE PROGRAM

Patricia J. Cianciolo and
Richard S. Prawat

Published by

The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects
Institute for Research on Teaching
252 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034

December 1990

This work is sponsored in part by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University. The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects is funded primarily by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the Office or Department (Cooperative Agreement No. G0098C0226).

Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

The **Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects** was awarded to Michigan State University in 1987 after a nationwide competition. Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary Subjects Center is a major project housed in the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT). The program focuses on conceptual understanding, higher order thinking, and problem solving in elementary school teaching of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, and the arts. Center researchers are identifying exemplary curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in the teaching of these school subjects; studying these practices to build new hypotheses about how the effectiveness of elementary schools can be improved; testing these hypotheses through school-based research; and making specific recommendations for the improvement of school policies, instructional materials, assessment procedures, and teaching practices. Research questions include, What content should be taught when teaching these subjects for understanding and use of knowledge? How do teachers concentrate their teaching to use their limited resources best? and In what ways is good teaching subject matter- specific?

The work is designed to unfold in three phases, beginning with literature review and interview studies designed to elicit and synthesize the points of view of various stakeholders (representatives of the underlying academic disciplines, intellectual leaders and organizations concerned with curriculum and instruction in school subjects, classroom teachers, state- and district-level policymakers) concerning ideal curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in these five content areas at the elementary level. Phase II involves interview and observation methods designed to describe current practice, and in particular, best practice as observed in the classrooms of teachers believed to be outstanding. Phase II also involves analysis of curricula (both widely used curriculum series and distinctive curricula developed with special emphasis on conceptual understanding and higher order applications), as another approach to gathering information about current practices. In Phase III, models of ideal practice will be developed, based on what has been learned and synthesized from the first two phases, and will be tested through classroom intervention studies.

The findings of Center research are published by the IRT in the Elementary Subjects Center Series. Information about the Center is included in the IRT Communication Quarterly (a newsletter for practitioners) and in lists and catalogs of IRT publications. For more information, to receive a list or catalog, or to be placed on the IRT mailing list to receive the newsletter, please write to the Editor, Institute for Research on Teaching, 252 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034.

Co-directors:	Jere E. Brophy and Penelope L. Peterson
Senior Researchers:	Patricia Cianciolo, Sandra Hollingsworth, Magdalene Lampert, Wanda May, Richard Prawat, Ralph Putnam, Cheryl Rosaen, Kathleen Roth, Suzanne Wilson
Editor:	Sandra Gross
Editorial Assistant:	Brian H. Bode

Abstract

This report summarizes the views of six experts in the teaching of literature. Three of these experts were university professors who are nationally known for their scholarly contributions in children's literature; three were teachers with equally glowing reputations in the pedagogical area. This panel of experts was asked to provide detailed written feedback about ideal curricula in literature at the elementary school level. This report summarizes the positions presented by each expert individually, then compares and contrasts perspectives across the full panel. Some general findings are of particular interest: All experts agreed with the features of ideal curriculum described in the set of framing questions sent to each respondent. They favored curricula in literature that is much more focused and coherent than currently is the norm. Interestingly, most of the respondents viewed literature as an opportunity for fostering important goals--both within language arts and across other subject matter areas. Literature was a good tool for teaching writing, for example, or as a vehicle for teaching content in social studies. One respondent thought that good literature led to greater self-understanding. The concept of literature as an aesthetic object worthy of study in its own right was notably absent in the perspectives represented here.

EXPERTS DEFINE THE IDEAL ELEMENTARY LITERATURE PROGRAM

Patricia J. Cianciolo and Richard S. Prawat[1]

The purpose of this paper is to summarize findings from research that explored the perspectives on an ideal literature curriculum offered by two sets of experts--university professors and elementary school teachers--regarding the teaching and learning of literature. This research, conducted by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary School Subjects at Michigan State University, was part of a larger study in which the perspectives on curriculum offered by panels of experts in each of six different subject matter areas were examined: mathematics, science, social studies, literature, the visual arts, and music. Furthermore, this study of experts' views is part of an ongoing effort aimed at identifying various factors that affect students' understanding of and ability to apply subject matter knowledge.

Theoretical Perspective

Each of the experts in this study was provided with the same set of instructions designed to elicit views about ideal curriculum. Specifically, each was asked to respond to a set of questions asking them to identify key features of ideal curricula in literature; they were then asked to apply these ideas by indicating how they would organize instruction relating to each of three important but representative goals ("developing a familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the key features of each type"; "developing the ability to apply specific criteria and techniques for

---

[1]Patricia J. Cianciolo and Richard S. Prawat, professors of teacher education at Michigan State University, are senior researchers with the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects. Prawat coordinated the comprehensive study across school subjects.

analyzing and evaluating the various types of literature"; and "developing a valuing and enjoyment of literature for its own sake--that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers"). [See Appendix.]

The first set of questions dealt with key features of ideal curricula. We suggested that ideal curricula will be designed to empower students with meaningfully understood, integrated, and applicable learning that can be accessed and used when relevant in a broad range of situations in and out of school. Our suggestions imply the following:

> Balancing breadth with depth by addressing limited content, but developing it sufficiently to ensure conceptual understanding
>
> Organizing the content around a limited number of powerful ideas (basic understandings and principles rooted in the disciplines)
>
> Emphasizing the relationships between powerful ideas, both by contrasting along common dimensions and integrating across dimensions, so as to produce knowledge structures that are differentiated yet cohesive
>
> Providing students not only with instruction but also with opportunities to actively process information and construct meaning; thus, the focus is less on thinking processes per se, and more on how to make use of previously acquired knowledge in new contexts

Within each subject area, experts were given the same general goals to develop for Grades 2 and 5. The three goals which all of the literature experts were asked to address were as follows:

> Developing a familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the key features of each type
>
> Developing the ability to apply specific criteria and techniques for analyzing and evaluating the various types of literature
>
> Developing a valuing and enjoyment of literature for its own sake, that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers

Methods and Data Source

The two types of experts were recruited in each of the six subject matter areas. The three professors (referred to later as P1, P2, and P3) were selected from among those who had made significant scholarly contributions in their fields and were familiar with elementary classrooms. The three elementary teachers (referred to later as T1, T2, and T3) were selected from among nominees suggested by leading scholars. Nominated teachers were interviewed by phone to develop more information about their teaching goals and methods. Then, after being stratified to ensure balance between the primary and later elementary grades, the teachers who seemed most impressive in their phone interviews were invited to participate. Those finally chosen to serve on the panel of literature experts were from various parts of the United States, including Ohio, Minnesota, New York, and California.

Data were developed from a detailed, written document in which experts (a) identified key features of ideal curricula; (b) indicated how they would address three representative but important goals in the literature curriculum; (c) listed important understandings at each of two grade levels (Grade 2 and Grade 5); and (d) developed a scenario for teaching one of the understandings at each of these grades. Individuals were asked to describe in detail how they would teach this key understanding, addressing such issues as what kind of information they might expose students to, what sorts of discourse would occur and for what purposes, and how they would evaluate student understanding or application of the key idea. In this sense, the scenario was clearly meant to be an exemplary instance of teaching.

The procedure used in analyzing experts' responses was as follows: A minimum of three researchers--a subject matter expert at the Center and two researchers--independently read all the material, focusing on material

relevant to each informant's views about ideal curricula in general and the literature curriculum in the elementary grades in particular. The researchers took detailed notes and prepared summaries of each expert's opinions, then discussed and integrated these summaries into a single version that reflected a shared understanding of what each expert had said. In this paper, the focus is on commonalities and differences in experts' views about curriculum within the literature domain.

Experts' Views About the Ideal Literature Curriculum

General Orientation

Before attempting to summarize individual respondents' views of good literature curriculum, some general remarks are in order. One encounters a wide variety of perspectives in various writings about literature. Some of these appear contradictory. There are educators who stress the enjoyment or entertainment value of literature or who see it as a way to promote personal adjustment (i.e., bibliotherapy). Many educators view literature as a tool for accomplishing patriotic or moralistic ends. Others stress the role that literature can play in learning other content, such as history, science, or in acquiring reading skills. Some educators assert that children's literature, especially "the classics," can provide students with a sense of cultural wholeness and/or historical continuity (Ravitch, 1985a, 1985b). In some elementary schools, literature is taught as an art form and, as such, children are taught to evaluate literature in terms of the aesthetic elements they recognize in it. Each of these approaches to literature in the elementary school is legitimated, to some extent, by current research and/or theory in the diverse areas of reading comprehension, literary criticism, cognitive and social psychology, aesthetic response, and/or discourse pragmatics.

Given the "projective" nature of literature in the school curriculum, it should come as no surprise that these different perspectives are strongly influenced by the type of professional training one receives. This is documented in some recent work by Adamson (1987). Apparently, individuals who study literature in fields like English or library science develop a different sense for what is of primary importance compared with those who approach it from a background in education. Those with a background in education tend to emphasize genre; those in English prefer to focus on literary elements such as plot and theme, while those in library science emphasize children's interests. Adamson describes other similarities and differences.

Education and library science showed more emphasis on learning theory and child development as related to literature, guidelines for selecting books and media, and reading literature aloud to children than did English. Education instructors were more concerned with the integration of literature with other subjects such as language arts and social studies than were library science and English instructors, although this interest is not really emphasized in education. Education was also interested in response to literature through activities. Library science was more interested in reading literature (Adamson, 1987).

In the present study, because of limited resources and the decision to compare university and public school educators, no attempt was made to sample expertise systematically across the disciplinary perspectives discussed by Adamson. Perhaps, in hindsight, we should have. By selecting experts whose primary training was in education, we may have unduly limited the range of perspectives--although this possibility is not as apparent as one might expect in the summaries that follow. The fact that our experts touched on most of the diverse purposes of literature cited above was a pleasant surprise and may

reflect the fact that we deliberately chose experts within education who do represent a diversity of views about good literature.

Summary of Individual Panelists' Responses

The University-Based Experts

P1's key features of ideal literature curriculum. P1 differentiates the central understandings and generalizations that should be developed in a literature program according to affective dimensions and analytical dimensions. The following statements by P1 fall under the affective rubric:

> Literature has value for us in our personal lives.
>
> Literature can meet the emotional needs of individuals and provide insights about values in society that are worth emulating.
>
> Literature speaks to us of generations past.
>
> [Literature allows us] to know something of those who came before us. Folk tales and classics allow us to share the continuity of [human] experience and come to appreciate the fact that people for generations have puzzled over some of the same dilemmas that we may also face in modern society.
>
> Literature provides vicarious experiences.
>
> It transports us to different times and places and we can learn how people feel, felt, or will feel in other periods of time.

Under the analytical dimension, the following statements by P1 would be included:

> There are various genres of literature and specific characteristics can be identified for each genre.
>
> Literature provides models for good writing.

P1's specific views on teaching and learning literature. P1's position appears to be based on what Rosenblatt (1978) describes as the transactional approach to the reading of literature, although Rosenblatt's terminology differs. In Rosenblatt's approach, the readers assume different attitudes

during reading: The so-called "aesthetic" stance appears to encompass many of the affective characteristics described by P1. The reader focuses on what happens affectively during the experience of reading the story, poem, drama, or literary biography.

Rosenblatt includes under the "efferent" rubric some of the responses regarded as "analytic" by P1--particularly the pragmatic stance relating to what one might learn or be able to use from the text. Supposedly, being able to identify with aspects of this literary work, such as the characters' response to conflict or the setting, is a key factor in the aesthetic stance. Parsons (1989), however, would broaden the criteria. He emphasizes that there are really two aspects to an aesthetic response: Affect or feeling is one, but this psychological response should be informed by a cognitive awareness of the technical devices in and around the literary work of art.

P1 stresses the analytical dimension in teaching literature; in this dimension, the student is directed toward analyzing critically the elements of literature and the author's craft of writing. P1 asserts that one important purpose of literature is to study writing. This is consistent with her view that literature should function as a means for the teaching and learning of several aspects of the elementary school curriculum. In conjunction with writing, P1 advocates a "modeling" approach, whereby students study the styles and techniques used by acclaimed authors and apply that information to their own writing. Elaborating on this notion, P1 explains,

> By reading much quality literature, students can evaluate style and technique which becomes a part of the students' schema for writing. Discussion of the same books read by a group of students supports this "natural discovery" process. One also develops an appreciation for literature in the process.

P1 apparently assumes that children will discover the technical devices authors employ to make a literary work the quality work it is recognized as being. This perspective is a common one. Literature is often used as a model for aspects of writing (labeled by some as imitative writing). In this approach, children pattern their writing after the structure and form of a genre or an author's style or syntactic techniques. The intent is to get the students to connect their writing with that of the professional author, seeing the work of the latter as that of a craftsman; presumably, this motivates the student to want to imitate the elements of craft employed by the writer--using them in his or her own writing. (We wonder how much consideration is given to the fact that writing is more than a craft; in good writing, teachers should also consider the element of true talent if they are to be honest in informing students about literary success and acclaim.)

P1 emphasizes that literature serves other functions as well, as evidenced by her remarks on contemporary realistic fiction:

> Contemporary realistic fiction allows a student to make the links between cause and effect in a character's life. Understanding a character's behavior and making some sense of it, allows a child to process vicariously the experience. It is rather like a rehearsal in the event that one finds oneself in a similar predicament. "How should I behave?" a student may ask. Perhaps it was in a piece of realistic fiction that the student reflected on a situation and acts having had that reflection. This is the power of realistic fiction.
>
> Becoming acquainted with various themes (family relationships, extended families in transition, foster children) and dealing with emotions that surround peer acceptance, making friends, developing sexuality, finding one's self, survival stories, aging, minority literature and religion are a few of the elements found in realistic fiction.

Examination of her statement reveals some significant aspects of her thinking about the teaching and learning of literature, especially literature

as an art form, and about the elements of fiction and the characteristics of specific genre. Her response suggests that P1 views contemporary, realistic fiction as a replication of reality which allows readers to gain self-understanding by comparing their lives to those of the characters portrayed. However, as will be pointed out in the final section of the paper, this notion is somewhat controversial.

P2's key features of ideal literature curriculum. P2 identified essentially the same key features for the elementary literature program as P1 did. Although P2 did not indicate specific "ages and stages" for each key concept or generalization, she did emphasize throughout her responses (especially in her sample lessons) that the teacher should recognize that some of these concepts or generalizations are developmental and should be taught when students have had sufficient "experience through wide reading and comparisons of books" and are ready to learn them. Evidence of this stance is seen in the comments she made relating to the key idea that there are specific characteristics for each literary genre: "The generally accepted conventions for each genre can be learned at different levels of complexity"; "They are learned gradually through experience with books"; and "The judgment of quality of a piece of literature is made in relation to the age group for which it is intended and the type of literature it is."

P2's specific view on teaching and learning literature. P2 identified several key concepts about literature which students in the elementary grades should learn:

- Literature helps us understand ourselves and others
- Literature brings alive history periods
- Literature develops out of imagination
- Narrative is a primary way we organize our minds
- Literature allows us to live lives beyond our own
- Hearing and reading stories develops a concept of story
- There are generally accepted conventions for each genre

- Children themselves create literature that reflects the same qualities of writing contained in distinguished pieces of literature

P2 made it quite clear that she thinks these concepts are interrelated, that they should be learned at different levels of complexity (spiraled), and that they are learned generally through experiencing literature repeatedly over a number of years. She said that these key concepts should be organized as part of the elementary school curriculum and should be integrated into reading, language arts, social studies, science, math, art, and drama.

More specifically, P2 said that at Grade 5 she would demonstrate the meaning of these key concepts about literature:

> Through a planned program of reading aloud, novels as core curriculum, studying historical periods through literature, using informational books as the basis for science to compare different interpretations of natural phenomena, as an exploration of math concepts, as stimulus for art projects, and as the basis for dramatic presentations.

P2 focused most of her responses on pedagogical considerations rather than on teaching literature as a discipline. Within this context, she identified a number of conditions which are necessary if children are to learn important concepts relating to literature. (She acknowledged that the source for these ideas was a paper by Brian Cambourne cited in Toward A Reading/ Writing Curriculum [Turbill & Butler, 1984].) The first of these conditions is "immersion." Highlighting immersion in a second-grade classroom, P2 explained:

> I would surround children with literature and share examples with them. When it was clear that they were familiar with lots of books, I would collect a wide variety of books, including folklore, picture books, poetry, wordless books, alphabet books, counting books, easy-to-read books, and informational books. After exploring the books with students for a period of time, I would ask them to talk about what they see in the books. Which ones are alike? Which ones are different? Can you put them into groups and explain why you chose to do so?

It seemed that in the second grade, P2 focuses on comprehension rather than on critical or evaluative thinking.

In the fifth grade, P2 would add "approximation" to the condition of immersion in teaching students how to analyze and evaluate different types of literature:

> My procedure would be to have them select several books of a genre of their choice. After they had read the books, I would ask them to rate the books according to the ones they think best. In discussion groups, I would have them explain their ratings and ask them to give the reasons for them. I would ask students to give examples from the books to illustrate their criteria for judging. Students' ratings and explanations would be approximations of generally accepted adult criteria but I would not push them to accept the adult standards without understanding. As they gain more experience through wide reading and comparisons of books, I would expect them to develop finer levels of taste.

P3's key features of ideal literature curriculum. In her discussion of the key features of a literature program, P3 reflected the social constructivist view of knowledge. She emphasized that language (and thus literature) empowers and socializes us. Literature is a tool that allows us to "learn what we want to learn rather than depending on others to tell us what we should learn." Literature allows us to use our imagination and capacity for invention--to think freely. As a tool for socialization, literature provides a mechanism for constructing information or knowledge about people in various cultures. It allows students "to connect to the lives of others--their peers and those they do not know."

P3 also emphasized that "literature has the power to reflect back for us our own experiences and thus becomes a means of self-affirmation." In classrooms where there are parallel cultures (e.g., white and African American), it becomes important for the experience of self-affirmation to be open to all students. At the same time, literature has the power to take us

out of ourselves, to permit us to share in the life experiences of cultural groups different from our own. There are limits in this regard, however. P3 quoted writer Arthur Blaustein as a caution for those who put too much faith in the power of literature to break with the past: Literature, he said, "cannot substitute for real experience, but it lets us enter into worlds other than our own and break down our insularity."

P3's statement of key concepts and generalizations are, in fact, quite compatible with some of those the other two professors identified. The main difference is that she discussed these key concepts in the context of their relevance and significance to minorities. Noticeably missing in her treatment were any key ideas pertaining to students' knowledge about the structure of literature or to aspects of children's cognitive development in understanding the aesthetic elements of literature.

P3's specific views on teaching and learning literature. P3 did not acknowledge that literature could or should be studied or treated in any way as an art form in the elementary grades--or at any grade level for that matter. P3's focus was clearly on literature as a humanity with major emphasis given to the language of literature and the role it plays as a means to promote literacy. She viewed literacy as a means of socialization.

P3 emphasized four basic points (summarized below) which she said teachers need to keep in mind when selecting and using literature in the elementary grades--to facilitate socialization (and thus self-affirmation and empowerment):

1. Literacy is empowering. It enables one to become independent--to gain insight about oneself and others. People who are literate can reason things out on their own; they need not rely on others to interpret text for them.

2. One must be socialized into language. One must be taught how to decipher (i.e., read) and write the symbols (letters and words) which represent the language of a particular community or cultural group.

3. Narrative is universal. Regardless of one's cultural or ethnic background, story or narrative is used to communicate one's thoughts and feelings to others and to become aware of their thoughts and feelings in return. It is through this medium that people inform, instruct, and entertain others.

4. Schools must be places where stories are shared across cultures. It is through narrative or stories that one can learn about--and come to respect and appreciate--how people are alike and different. Through stories, readers can become less parochial in their perspective. They can learn to function more effectively in a society typified by its cultural pluralism.

P3 considered literature an essential component of any literacy program, and better if that literature is included in a literacy program based on the whole-language approach (combining the teaching of reading of literature with writing). P3's avid support for the whole-language approach is evident in her account of what happened when a relative learned to read and write in this manner. This woman, born in the rural south, at a time in the early 1900s when education for African Americans was a luxury granted to only a few, went north when she was in her 30s and learned to read and write as she studied the Bible under the tutelage of a fundamentalist religious group. Despite the fact that this woman's "teachers" taught her that there was only one way to interpret the Bible, she was in some very real sense made free because she could read. She could read the Bible (and other books) for herself. She was free to make her own decision about how she wanted to behave. Because they also required her to write, she was no longer dependent on her family or friends to help her with other tasks which required literacy. "She had gained control."

P3 used this account to demonstrate, too, that when one is allowed to interpret the printed word as one wishes (not as someone else chooses to interpret it), there is room for the imagination, for invention, for comparing and sharing meaning with others, for doubting, for constructing one's own

meaning, and for thinking for oneself. This freedom, says P3, can be seen as threatening by members of groups who see the school as a place which alienates their children from their traditional values. So we have censorship--teach my child to read and write, but don't let him read or write anything which may make him question me, my authority, my belief system, my values. Whole-language teachers must be prepared to deal with the questioning aspect of literacy.

When discussing the power of literature to nurture imaginative thinking and the capacity for invention, P3 points to Albert Einstein who reportedly said that the gift of fantasy meant more to him than his talent for absorbing positive knowledge. P3 agreed with Einstein's position:

> It makes sense, since what our geniuses do for us is to imagine beyond what is currently known, to fantasize about what might be. Literacy permits us to share in other people's imaginings, to share our own. The word imagination shares its roots not only with image and magic, but also with magi and mage--those ancient repositories of wisdom.

P3 emphasized that this power of literacy to nurture imaginative thinking becomes "the justification for using real literature in whole-language classrooms." Reading selections written or adapted for the purpose of teaching sign vocabulary (such as those traditionally used in most basal reading series), she added, "understandably might give imagination a very low priority."

When discussing the role of literature in what she refers to as "the notion of socializing children into school-based language," P3 said that literature, especially when it is combined with collaborative writing, reveals to children all that language can do for them, and it socializes beginners into literature, especially when they are presented as shared literary experiences--as with the very popular "big books." P3 is very concerned about

children who are not "socialized into school-type literacy." Generally, in literate societies, children do come to school with a great deal of tacit knowledge about written language, but only if they have been socialized into books do they come with the kind of literacy knowledge the school finds it easy to build on. In cases where they do not, school becomes the place where children are socialized into the kind of literacy it values.

P3 acknowledged that school-based literacy is not universal, but it is very likely that "storying" (narrative) is universal. She said that it is because of and through this universality of narrative, the telling of stories, that we can "connect to the lives of all the children in our classrooms, no matter what kind of discourse they have been socializing into, no matter what social group they are a part of." Therefore, she said, classrooms ought to be places where "storying is a legitimate way of knowing," knowing about ourselves, about other people, about all people of the past and present. So, in this context, traditional (folk) literature as well as modern literature should be used, for these are narratives told by people of all cultures depicting people of all cultures.

Elementary Classroom-Based Experts

T1's key features of ideal literature program. In response to our request asking respondents to comment on the key features of ideal curriculum proposed by project staff, T1 commented:

> I think I basically have problems with the very idea of an "ideal curricula" for literature. I use literature to teach across the curriculum: I use literature [trade books] rather than basal texts to teach reading, and the units I teach in other subjects wouldn't be possible without the use of literature. The concept of "balancing breadth with depth by addressing limited content but developing it sufficiently to ensure conceptual understanding," makes perfect sense to me when we're talking about social studies or science or mathematics. The teacher who tries to cover too much information in those subjects naturally must give most topics short shrift. But literature? Are you saying that I might want to limit the number of books or authors or types of books I use in my classroom? I can't

> see any benefit to that, especially when it seems to me that teachers need to be encouraged to bring more literature-based activities into the classroom. My mind boggles at the thought that there could possibly be a way to limit the number of "powerful ideas" in literature. If I translate "powerful ideas" to mean themes or concepts an author is trying to put across, then I want to give students the ability to ferret out just as many possible powerful ideas from a piece of literature as is humanly possible.

T1 did identify <u>two</u> understandings which she thought elementary school students should acquire as a result of reading and using literature in the elementary school. These understandings seem to pertain to one's general attitudes about responding to literature rather than to concepts or generalizations that are needed to understand the nature and substance of literature as a subject which has a content that can be studied. She said that it is important for children to recognize that "involvement with a book is a very personal experience, that we all do not like the same books." There may be a developmental factor at work as well: "Taste in literature," she added, "changes in an individual's life; a reader might dislike a book at one age and find it to be a favorite later."

<u>T1's specific views on teaching and learning literature</u>. T1's comment about the dangers of focusing on a limited number of "powerful ideas" in literature could be interpreted as an argument for traditional teaching. If the aim is to teach a discrete set of facts, skills, and concepts, literature can play a role. Teachers simply need to ensure that students are exposed to works of literature that contain the desired background information (i.e., information that will contribute to their understanding in other subject matter domains). T1 seems to favor this view of literature.

Consider the following example of a lesson in which she suggests that literature can help students integrate knowledge and make connections or notice relationships: "In doing units, such as a study of mammals in a

science class, I'd have informational books from public libraries available for student use." The role of literature in this "unit" seems to be to supplement and/or to enrich whatever facts students were to learn from some other more basic source. No mention is made about emphasizing the relationships between the key concepts or understandings that were focused on in the study of mammals (one of our key features); nor does T1 indicate how the reading of literature or the study of any other subject might be used to help students learn anything that supports the acquisition of essential content.

One must question whether or not T1 understands what is meant by higher order thinking. In her lesson on the motifs that appear in folk tales from different cultures, the questions which she suggests for directing students' thinking do not call for accounting why or how these variants were created by people of different cultures. In fact, there is no reference to any of the cultural aspects (or even geographical or historical aspects) that might account for these variations. Instead, the focus is on the more obvious differences:

> As the children begin to notice similarities in the stories, make a large chart of samenesses and differences among the books [picture book retellings of "Cinderella" stories from various countries], noting such things as: What is the main character's name? Who is in her family? How does she dress? How does she come to meet the rich man/prince? How does he find her? How does the story end?

T1 states that there is no need for any specified scope and sequence to the study of literature, especially if one is to achieve the goal of developing a valuing and enjoyment of literature for its own sake, that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers:

> I can't imagine trying to organize these [key ideas] about literature into some "form" to present to students. This is an ongoing process which with any luck began with parents reading stories to their children from infancy. In the real world we do meet students who tell us how much they "hate" to read, and what we

> can do is convince them that they've been misinformed by giving them really positive experiences with the world of literature. A teacher reading aloud a terrific book is the best example of the pleasures of reading that any class could have.

There is little doubt that T1 values literature for the pleasure it offers, and wants her students to acquire this same attitude about it. Apparently, T1 believes that she can help her students realize this goal if she emphasizes the affective response to literature--that is, if she focuses on the pleasure it offers them. There seems to be little or no awareness of the aesthetic elements of literature, nor does she seem to be knowledgeable about what she might do through the study of literature to foster the cognitive development of students' aesthetic response to literature.

T2's key features of ideal curricula. T2 appears enthusiastic in her endorsement of the key features and conditions for learning that were identified in the Center's description of ideal curricula. However, her verbal endorsement of the characteristics of ideal curricula is contradicted in some of the pedagogical techniques she advocated for the teaching and learning of literature. This will become apparent in the discussion about her views of the study of literature.

Reacting to the view that learning is facilitated when the student is able to develop relations between new and prior knowledge and connect that knowledge to other knowledge, T2 said that the "use of previously acquired knowledge emphasizes the idea that knowledge is connected and cohesive. This prevents any ideas from being forgotten or unused." She does not indicate that such a practice would also lead to learning knowledge in greater depth and breadth. T2 appears to equate the connecting notion with the practice of spiraling. In fact, she goes on to elaborate on how one could "spiral areas

of understanding" within the context of using literature in teaching social studies.

T2's key features of ideal literature curriculum. T2 did not identify any additional key features of an ideal literature curriculum. Her comments pertained to the specific facts and concepts that she would focus on in her teaching of literature and the pedagogical procedures she would use to accomplish the three major goals of an ideal literature program, which respondents were asked to respond to:

> Developing a familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the key features of each type
>
> Developing the ability to apply specific criteria and techniques for analyzing and evaluating the various types of literature
>
> Developing a valuing and enjoyment of literature for its own sake, that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers

T2's specific views on teaching and learning literature. Examination of the pedagogical procedures discussed by T2 reveals that she has implemented some of the practices that we believe are related to teaching for understanding. The fact that she values the practice of linking subject matter to facilitate learning is reflected in the following statement:

> [It] is essential to make learning personal for students or [to make it] their own. If they write, they can better evaluate and understand published works. It is, therefore, necessary to create a link between reading and writing for the students. Writing in a particular style gives the students an appreciation of that style and allows the student to better analyze published work (i.e., Does the author follow the expected form? Does the author use a particular style of language?)

To endorse further the practice of linkage (which she refers to at different times as integrating and connecting), she emphasizes the fact that children find this practice "quite satisfying":

> For example, if a social studies unit studied what a community is, the reading [a story] about a community (real or imaginary) is

> satisfying if the child can see the various elements taught (i.e., goods and services, basic needs, etc.). This connection of concepts taught in a curriculum area helps to reemphasize these concepts in a different way. Children seem to light up when they recognize a previously taught concept. It often appears as if they are discovering this connection for the first time.

T2 maintains that students learn to apply specific criteria, characteristics, and techniques for evaluating literature after having developed a familiarity with their presence and use in specific literary works. She suggests that this familiarity comes about by "locating" them and analyzing how the authors use them in their stories. For example, in studying techniques for presenting the theme of the story, T2 suggests that students determine how the different authors use contrast, forms of humor, unusual settings, personification, fact-based fiction, current events, and so forth. T2 believes that students should examine selections to determine how authors use words to present the theme by asking students to notice if the words they use are unusual or unreal, if phrases are repeated or rhyming, and if the authors "paint pictures" with words. She recommends that teachers choose books in which various methods are used to address similar themes. This approach makes use of direct instruction rather than discovery to establish aesthetic distance, to establish a frame of reference which literary artists (authors) create by use of technical devices in and around their works of art (the stories).

T2 would also introduce the use of reference books (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus). Research, she writes, should

> show how the use of precise words helps the author communicate ideas. Lessons [should] be taught on verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. These need not be taught as grammar, but as tools in writing. Books read aloud or as a class could be researched for "picture words" [to determine] how certain words create better pictures.

T2 believes that the students should continue to look for "good words," but they should now add on the researching of how the author uses these words within a "given structure." By "given structure," T2 apparently means a specific literary genre. In the discussion which follows, T2 focuses on mystery stories and suggests that in addition to considering some other characteristics of the mystery, one locates "mystery words." She recommends that after becoming aware of the characteristics of the mystery story, the children should each write their own mystery, incorporating these and other "mystery words," as well as the other characteristics of this genre.

T3's key features of ideal curricula. T3 states that she does not disagree with any of the suggestions about the key features of ideal curricula. Nor did she wish to add any additional features to our list. She did, however, suggest several guidelines relevant to the teaching and using of literature in the elementary school. These guidelines emphasize that the teaching of literature should

> Help the children to discover a love for reading that they can carry with them throughout their lives
>
> Enable readers to discover that reading can be a lifelong tool for gaining new skills, learning about cultures, and gaining new knowledge
>
> Incorporate a broad range of genres
>
> Develop an awareness of the literary elements of plot, characterization, setting, language (style), and theme
>
> Allow students to discover that reading can give one hours of pleasure, entertainment, and escape to other worlds

T3's specific views on teaching and learning literature. T3 seemed quite comfortable discussing pedagogical practices pertaining to the teaching and learning of literature. She states that the teaching of literature should

Occur on a daily basis in the elementary school

Allow for a daily silent reading period

Provide opportunity for response and reaction to a story

Serve as a catalyst for activities in reading, writing, language development, drama, and art

T3 also supports the practice of combining knowledge in the different subject areas. Not only did she include a statement about integration in her list of guidelines for the teaching of literature, she applied the concept in a sample lesson. Using an award-winning, historical novel (the 1987 Newbery Award Book, The Whipping Boy by Sid Fleischman, New York: Greenwillow, 1986), T3 combined the teaching of history (i.e., learning about the practice of using whipping boys in royal households) with the teaching of literature (i.e., developing criteria for determining the quality of a literary selection). Thus, fifth-grade students in her hypothetical lesson were asked to respond both to the content and the quality of the story. Specific criteria were used in evaluating the latter, including judgments about how effectively the author developed and interrelated the elements of fiction and the characteristics of the genre (i.e., adventure story).

Like T2, T3 strongly advocated using literature to teach specific skills: grammar and usage, comprehension, creative writing, research, language development, and math applications. This is illustrated in some of the following activities associated with lessons:

In a language lesson about verbs, Kitten Can by Bruce McMillan (New York: Lothrop, 1984) serves as a catalyst to explain a verb as children observe pictures of a kitten in action, act out the verbs, repeat the verbs, and then develop their own list of verbs to describe movement of another animal or object.

In a social studies theme on pioneers, the teacher decides to create a quilt. Before actually beginning the quilt or even before discussing the project in detail, the teacher shares books such as The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flournoy (New York: Dial, 1985) or The Quilt Story by Tony Johnston (New York: Putnam, 1985).

We wonder to what extent these activities foster higher order thinking or aesthetic response to the stories mentioned. Some researchers would argue that language is not learned by focusing on language--it is learned by using it for something else (i.e., speaking, reading, writing, and listening) and by focusing on the something else (Edelsky, 1988).

Critique

In the main, the university professors and the elementary teachers who participated in this study tended to espouse the same key features, understandings, and generalizations about the teaching and learning of literature in the elementary grades. The main differences in the responses of these experts were in the levels of sophistication with which they discussed aspects of curriculum development and conceptual understandings about children's literature. The elementary teachers were less inclined to use current terminology associated with curriculum development and seemed to have less knowledge about literature in general and about children's literature in particular. Also, the elementary teachers were far more concerned with and spoke in much greater detail about the selection and impact of specific pedagogical practices than the professors did.

At a general level, there was strong endorsement for the features of an ideal curriculum laid out in a set of framing questions sent to each respondent. All of the professors said that they agreed with these features. No one added any key features. Two of the classroom teachers said that they agreed with these criteria. One teacher took issue with this list of features. This may have resulted from a misinterpretation of what we meant by each of the statements--especially the one about organizing curriculum around a limited set of powerful ideas. An examination of T3's statements describing an ideal literature curriculum, and the specific lessons that she outlined for

the study of literature, indicates that she did not reject our criteria in practice. Her guidelines for ideal curricula reflect support of the key features highlighted in our list--albeit indirect support.

The exemplary lessons submitted by both the professors and the teachers dealt primarily with the study of literary genres, literary elements, children's reading interests and needs, guidelines for selecting books, integration of literature with other subjects, and affective response to literature. The focus, then, tended to be primarily on the more "pragmatic" uses of literature; that is, using literature as a way to interest or motivate youngsters in learning, or as a vehicle for teaching content and skills of various sorts. This is not surprising, given the disciplinary training of our respondents (see Adamson, 1987).

In their discussions of an ideal literature program in the elementary grades, neither the college professors nor elementary teachers directly recommended or alluded to a specific scope and sequence of key features or central understandings or generalizations. This seems significant, considering that one of the professors played a major role in planning and implementing a statewide literature initiative and another wrote one of the three most commonly used college children's literature textbooks. Related to the aspect of scope and sequence is the concern for the role that prior knowledge plays in students' learning. Each of the teachers alluded to making use of the children's prior knowledge, but this was always done by sequencing specific facts or skills within a single unit. In other words, the prior knowledge they were concerned with was knowledge that was scaffolded and was taught to the students within a unit on motifs in folk tales, characteristics of a mystery/detective story, and so on. They did not seem to be concerned

about taking advantage of or even assessing the prior knowledge which the students might well have acquired in a previous grade.

Although the respondents were not asked directly to present their opinions about how the literary selections should be offered to the students (individual trade book, multiple copies of individual trade books to be used with groups of various sizes, or textbooks), it is worth mentioning that none of the respondents alluded to students reading selections in children's literature textbooks. In fact, they spoke only of students reading literature from single copies of individual trade books or of using multiple copies of individual trade books. This is in direct contrast with the materials most commonly used in the English classes in American secondary schools, where literature is studied from textbook anthologies and are likely to be used in their entirety, without much intervention on the part of the teacher.

The questions that teachers typically ask in the school context call for the factual recall of details on the part of students. The emphasis is on what the authors wrote, rather than on why or how they wrote it, or what connection it had with their lives (Sosniak & Perlman, 1989). The teachers in the present study also tended to focus on factual questions, but each did include some questions that called for higher level thinking about the content and structure of the literature studied.

All of the experts endorsed the practice of integrating literature with other subject areas. Examination of the lessons in which this practice was implemented reveals that reference to teaching or learning of literary understandings or generalizations that should result from this lesson was usually omitted. In the main, the content of a literary selection (the historical facts it contained, the specific words an author used, the model, an author's style, the selection provided, etc.) was used as a tool to teach

the facts or skills pertaining to another subject. Integration of subjects did not actually occur in these lessons in which literature was used as a vehicle to teach an aspect of another subject.

One professor recommended that literature be used to teach literacy and self-affirmation. P3 emphasized that language socializes us and literature is one way of constructing information or knowledge about people of various cultures. More specifically, because literature is a vehicle for socialization, it empowers the readers to use their own language. They learn to use their imagination and their capacity for invention. They become aware of the ideas and values held by others and are able to connect to the lives of others, their peers, and those they do not know. This socialization through the use of literature, said this professor, is especially important for minority students.

The "modeling" role that literature can play in teaching writing (labeled by some as imitative writing) was recommended by five out of the six respondents. They stated that students can study the style and techniques of writing an author uses and apply them to their "schema" for writing. Usually this study would be accomplished through discussion of aspects of the same book read by a group of students, and the discussion would be based primarily on what the students "discovered" about the author's style or writing techniques. The experts emphasized that students also develop an appreciation for literature in this process.

The practice of modeling implies endorsement of the idea that the study of literature should function as a tool for teaching writing. Also, it is based on the assumptions that children are going to recognize, by discovery, the aesthetic techniques which the author employed in his/her literary work of art and that the selection has gained recognition for its literary excellence

merely because the author used these techniques. In reality, as the students connect their writing through modeling with that of the published, professional author, they tend to view the act of creating literature as a craft and the writer as a craftsman. They are led to believe that all they have to do to be a successful writer is to figure out (or have someone else point out) the elements or techniques of this "craft" that an acclaimed writer has employed and then use them in their own writing. There doesn't appear to be any consideration of the fact that writing of literature amounts to more than using specific techniques in specific ways, that success in writing literature is due to something more than skillful craftsmanship. The element of talent must be addressed, somewhere along the line, if teachers are to be honest in informing students about the art of creating literature and about becoming a successful and acclaimed author.

All of the respondents suggested that literature, especially realistic fiction or problem novels, could be used to help students respect and appreciate themselves and others and to cope with their problems better. They believed that realistic fiction allowed the students to make the links between the cause and effect in a character's life and that this linkage led them to understand a character's behavior and make some sense of it. This insight supposedly allows a child to process the experience vicariously. "It is rather like a rehearsal in the event that one finds oneself in a similar predicament," said one professor.

Examination of the practice of using literature to allow vicarious experience reveals some significant aspect of the respondents' thinking of literature as an art and their understanding of the function of the elements of fiction and the characteristics of specific genres in that context. The kind of response this practice encourages to reading literature, especially

realistic fiction, suggests that one may properly view literature as a replication of reality, that it is proper to compare aspects of one's life to those of the book characters' if one wants or needs to better understand why one feels or thinks as one does under certain circumstances. Identification by readers with characters as they respond to a particular conflict or problem is an important component of the literary experience, but readers must always be able to pull back when they have finished the story and realize that this is only an allusion to life, this is only part of the way life is.

Because literature is an art, what is depicted in it is not a mirror of reality. Encouraging literal response to a story and encouraging students to make direct application of aspects of their real-life circumstances to what the literary artist has changed into an allusion to real life through selective interpretation is a misuse of literature and transmits misinformation about the nature of literature. Furthermore, if one acknowledges that literature is an art, one must also examine the aesthetic functions that the elements of fiction and the characteristics of a particular genre have in creating this literary piece of art. They are not merely details that one identifies when teaching story schema as a way to facilitate comprehension or prediction skills (as in the approaches currently so prevalent in teaching reading).

An Alternate View

Aesthetic development consists of the gradual acquisition of insights about the aesthetic aspects of a literary selection or about the pictures that illustrate the story. The later stages of aesthetic development are reached only via an education in which literature as art is frequently encountered and readers are expected to think about literature seriously. Aesthetic development seldom occurs to any significant extent when literature is viewed as a

time-filler, as a vehicle for learning skills or facts in subjects such as history, reading, science, or health.

Even children in kindergarten and the primary grades are quite capable of becoming sensitive to and understanding insights about the basic aesthetic aspects of literature. When children are offered literary selections they can understand and are interested in, and when that literature is presented to them primarily for the pleasure and joy it might offer them, they can learn how to respond aesthetically to literature. With such an introduction to literature, young children can quickly learn to recognize that literature might well offer them memorable, pleasurable, and interesting experiences. They can understand that literature is an art and, therefore, even though the realm of literature comprises all aspects of the human experience, literature is not merely a mirror reflection of life.

The author and/or illustrator engages in selective interpretation of these aspects of the real world in order to create an illusion of that reality. Young children are quite capable of understanding and recognizing that there are certain characteristics and criteria for each kind of literature. (Eventually they will understand that these characteristics and criteria have been established by a culture over many years and are commonly used to evaluate the quality of these selections.) Even young children, if given numerous opportunities to be exposed to a variety of quality literature written by authors and illustrators whose works vary in style, genre, subject, and tone are quite capable of developing individual literary preferences and tastes.

References

Adamson, L. G. (1987). Results of the Children's Literature Assembly's survey on teaching in U. S. colleges and universities. Bookbird, 25(2), 11-15.

Edelsky, C. (1988). Living in the author's world: Analyzing the author's craft. California Reader, 21(3), 14-17.

Parsons, M. J. (1989). How we understand art: A cognitive developmental account of aesthetic experience. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ravitch, D. (1985a). The schools we deserve. New York: Basic Books.

Ravitch, D. (1985b). The troubled crusade: American education 1945-1980. New York: Basic Books.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). The reader, the text, the poem. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Sosniak, L. A., & Perlman, S. L. (1989, March). Secondary education by the book. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Turbill, J., & Butler, A. (Eds.). (1984). Toward a reading/writing classroom. New York: Heinemann.

APPENDIX

Instructions for the Study

CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT STUDY

Mission of the Elementary Subjects Center

The Elementary Subjects Center is one of the mission-oriented research and development centers established by the federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Our mission is to develop knowledge about effective teaching in five content areas (social studies, science, mathematics, literature, and the arts) at the elementary grade level, especially as it relates to the conceptual understanding and higher order thinking aspects of learning in those content areas. We seek to identify effective strategies for content area teaching that will empower students with knowledge, skills, and dispositions that they can access and use when relevant--both now and in the future, both in and out of school.

The decision to focus on this mission was prompted by several commonly made criticisms of current practice. One is that although our elementary schools seem to be doing a good job of teaching basic knowledge and skills, as indexed by scores on short answer or multiple choice tests, more emphasis may be placed on rote memorization than on meaningful understanding. A second criticism is that insufficient attention is being given to critical thinking, problem solving, and other higher order thinking aspects of content learning. Related to this is the concern that curriculum writers' continuing attempts to accommodate pressures for introduction of new content have enhanced breadth at the expense of depth. The result is that many topics are merely mentioned rather than taught in sufficient depth to develop conceptual understanding. This creates fragmentation. Instead of integrated networks of content structured around key concepts and generalizations, curricula have become clusters of disconnected content that are not organized coherently. Too many students learn only a smattering of relatively unconnected facts and ideas, most of which are soon forgotten. As a result, they end up able to access their learning in usable form only when presented with well-defined problem situations that cue them to do so (e.g., school assignments and tests).

These concerns reflect our views about learning: We believe that knowledge that is not well connected to other knowledge and past experience is transient and thus of limited value. It is generally not available for use in potentially relevant situations outside of the specific contexts in which it is acquired. Knowledge that is richly connected to other knowledge, on the other hand, is much more accessible. Because it is part of a network or structure, this type of knowledge also provides more entry points for subsequent learning, thus influencing the acquisition of new knowledge. The ability to develop relations between new and prior knowledge is facilitated when knowledge already rich in relations is part of the learner's cognitive structure. The importance of connected knowledge has been emphasized by a number of researchers; in fact, some equate connectedness with conceptual understanding.

Purpose of This Study

Our Center's research and development agenda calls for identifying ways to improve on current practice, particularly with respect to the criticisms and concerns described above. In a series of related studies, we plan to develop information about expert opinions on ideal practice, describe the variation in current practice (with emphasis on description of what occurs in classrooms where students are being empowered with accessible and usable learning), formulate and test the feasibility of guidelines for improvement, and test the effectiveness of those guidelines.

During the first phase of this research agenda, we will acquire and synthesize expert opinion about ideal practice in each of the content areas. The Curriculum Improvement Study is part of this effort. In this study we will be gathering information from two types of experts: (a) university professors recognized for their leadership in elementary level literature education (and in particular, in methods of designing such education so as to empower students with accessible and usable learning) and (b) elementary grade teachers recognized for the excellence of their literature teaching (and in particular, their efforts to ensure that their students are empowered with accessible and usable learning).

In the study which is discussed in this paper, you will outline your ideas about the key features of ideal elementary level literature curricula and illustrate these with examples. By analyzing your responses and those of the other experts included in the study, we expect to identify areas of consensus that represent the best current thinking about the ideal features of elementary literature teaching.

Thoughts About Ideal Curriculum

We are interested in having you identify what you consider to be the key features of an ideal elementary grades literature curriculum. Before getting to specifics, we need to clarify two aspects of our use of the term curriculum, and our intentions in designing this study. It is essential that you understand these two points.

First, although we call this the Curriculum Improvement Study and frequently use the term "curriculum" for convenience in these instructions, we give the term broad meaning. When we ask you to identify ideal features of a curriculum or to critique a curriculum, we mean to include not only the content (knowledge, skills or strategies, values, and dispositions) addressed in the curriculum's scope and sequence, but also everything else in the literature program that impacts on students. Specifically, we mean to include the program's overall goals, the content selected for inclusion, the texts and other curriculum materials, the instructional methods, and the methods of evaluating student learning. In conveying your ideas about the features of ideal curricula, we want you to consider all of these features and the ways that they interrelate to

produce effects on the students. You may find it helpful to mentally substitute a term such as "program," "overall approach," or "curriculum-instruction-evaluation combination" for our term "curriculum" as you read through the directions and think about your responses.

Our second clarification concerns the content aspects of ideal curricula. Please bear in mind the breadth versus depth issue and our stress on the importance of (a) empowering students with accessible networks of coherently organized and usable learning and (b) allowing for sufficient development of critical thinking, problem solving, and other higher order applications of this learning. If these goals are to be accomplished, choices must be made; that is, breadth of coverage must be limited to allow for sufficient depth. One cannot address all worthy goals or include all potentially relevant content, instructional methods, activities, assignments, or evaluation methods.

Ideal Curricula

Features of Ideal Curricula

In conveying your ideas about key features of ideal curricula, please begin by reacting to those that we have already described. We have suggested that ideal curricula will be designed to empower students with meaningfully-understood, integrated, and applicable learning that can be accessed and used when relevant in a broad range of situations in and out of school. This implies the following:

(a) balancing breadth with depth by addressing limited content but developing it sufficiently to ensure conceptual understanding;

(b) organizing the content around a limited number of powerful ideas (basic understandings and principles rooted in the disciplines);

(c) emphasizing the relationships between powerful ideas, both by contrasting along common dimensions and integrating across dimensions, so as to produce knowledge structures that are differentiated yet cohesive;

(d) providing students not only with instruction but also with opportunities to actively process information and construct meaning;

(e) fostering problem solving and other higher order thinking skills in the context of knowledge application; thus, the focus is less on thinking processes per se, and more on how to make use of previously acquired knowledge in new contexts.

Questions for you to Address Relating to Ideal Curriculum

Given the above discussion, we would like you to begin by considering two questions:

1. You may or may not agree with our suggestions about key features of ideal curricula. If you agree with everything we have said, just say so and proceed to Question 2. However, if there is anything about these ideas that you would not fully endorse, please tell us. Do you simply disagree with any of them? Do you partly agree but think that they need to be qualified or rephrased? Are there any that you see as desirable but not important enough to be considered key features? Please address these or any other points of disagreement that you may have with our suggestions about the key features of ideal curricula.

2. Beyond what has already been said in your response to the previous question, and keeping in mind our broad definition of "curricula," what other features would you identify as key features of ideal curricula? List as many such features as you believe are important enough to be considered key features, and elaborate as much as you can.

Curriculum Design Exercises

Now that you have given your ideas about the key features of ideal curricula at the K-6 level, we would like you to apply them in responding to three curriculum design exercises. For these exercises, we will present you with three important goals that are representative of what an elementary literature curriculum might address, and for each goal we will ask you to respond to four questions.

Goals to be Addressed

You may find it helpful to approach these exercises as if you were a consultant assisting the staff of a local school. The school has decided to have you address three general goals that are representative of what they are trying to accomplish in their elementary level literature program. They are particularly concerned with conceptual understanding and higher order thinking aspects of each goal. The three goals that you have been asked to address are as follows:

(a) developing a familiarity with literature to the point that students can identify the key features of each type;

(b) developing the ability to apply specific criteria and techniques for analyzing and evaluating the various types of literature;

(c) developing a valuing and enjoyment of literature for its own sake -- that is, for the aesthetic experience it offers.

Assume that the school serves a student population that is racially and culturally diverse but neither notably high nor notably low in socioeconomic status, that the students are grouped heterogeneously, that class sizes average about 25, and that the teachers work with adequate but not abundant resources. Also assume that the teachers are fairly well grounded in all the subjects they teach, including literature. With these constraints, you could suggest whatever strategies you wish for accomplishing the three goals, but your recommendations should be realistic (e.g., cognizant of the teacher's needs to handle the full range of subject matter areas and to address other major goals even within the literature program).

Questions for You to Address for Each Goal

For each of the three goals, please answer each of the following questions:

1. What important understandings or generalizations should be developed in students if the goal is to be accomplished? You may include as many of these as you wish and describe them in as much detail as you wish, although given the focus on the most basic and powerful understandings and generalizations, we expect that you will be able to respond with brief listings of perhaps as many as ten such key understandings or generalizations once you have thought through and organized your ideas. (An example might be helpful: If the overall goal is developing an understanding of the various uses of literature [i.e., pleasure, escape, or gaining knowledge about the human experience], the notion that the same literary selection can be used for multiple purposes could be a key understanding.)

2. What sorts of relationships exist among the key understandings and generalizations you have listed? Do they all fit together into a single network? Are two or more of them linked through cause/effect, rule/example, whole/part, or other logical relationships? Do some of them form natural sequences along some common dimension? Feel free to supplement your comments about such relationships with diagrams or other illustrations if you wish to do so.

3. How would you organize these key understandings and generalizations to present them to students? Explain your rationale for this organizational plan (i.e., would it be determined by the logical relationships outlined in your answer to the previous question, or instead by other criteria such as the degree to which the key ideas refer to things that are already familiar to children at particular ages or the degree to which they can be represented in concrete terms). In general, please describe the approach that you would take in ordering or organizing these ideas in the curriculum, and explain your rationale.

4. Select one of the key understandings or generalizations you have listed and explain in detail how you would propose to develop it at the second and the fifth grade levels. (You may wish to start with the grade you are more knowledgeable about and use it as a basis for comparison with the other grade. We can help you decide which ideas on your list would be the best ones to use as the basis for this part of the exercise; we will be looking for ideas that seem to be at about the right level of generality and to be appropriate for development at both the second grade and the fifth grade level).

   For each of these two grade levels, tell us in detail how you would teach the key understanding or generalization. Because it is likely that it will take more than one lesson to teach the understanding, please sketch out your overall instructional plan first, then select one prototypic lesson for more detailed treatment . For this lesson, please address the following: (a) What kind of information would you provide through teacher presentation, through having the students read, or through some other mechanism? (b) What sorts of teacher-student or student-student discourse would occur, and with what purposes in mind? (c) What activities or assignments would be included, and with what purposes? and (d) How would you evaluate student understanding or application of the key idea?

Summary of What We Would Like To Have You Do

1. State whether or not you agree with our suggestions about the key features of ideal curricula, and elaborate on any disagreements.

2. Identify any additional features of ideal curricula.

3. Respond to the following, for <u>each</u> of the three goals listed on page 4.

    a. Identify the central understandings and generalizations that should be developed.

    b. Identify the relationships among these central understandings and generalizations.

    c. Organize these key understandings and generalizations as you would to present them to students.

    d. Explain this organization.

    e. Describe how one of these central understandings or generalizations would be taught at the second and at the fifth grade levels.